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SENSITIVE

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S/ES-O FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY IN NEW YORK, NEA FOR IPA AND FRONT
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SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 7, 2009, 1300 LOCAL

REF: (A) JERUSALEM 0047; (B) JERUSALEM 0051

1. (SBU) Summary. Israeli ground operations and air strikes continued on the morning of January 7 after what Gaza-based contacts described as a relatively quiet night. Ground forces continued to fight militants around Gaza City, and moved closer to Khan Yunis without entering the city. Airstrikes continued around Gaza City and along the southern border with Egypt. The GoI announced that there will be a "humanitarian pause" January 7 from 1300 to 1600 to allow humanitarian supplies to move within Gaza. At least four rockets were fired into Israel before 1300 local time. The UN reported 640 dead and 2850 wounded, with almost half of the wounded women and children. IDF mortars struck a UNRWA shelter in Jabaliya on January 6, killing 40 and wounding 45. West Bank demonstrations continue, causing minor disturbances. End summary.

Ground Operations Continue

2. (SBU) Gaza-based sources reported that the IDF resumed intense military activities the morning of January 7, following a relatively quiet night. IDF activity was concentrated in five primary areas:

- the IDF continued to operate around the towns of Bayt Lahiya and Bayt Hanun, and shelled a mosque in Bayt Lahiya, killing one and wounding four;

- east of Gaza City, the IDF continued to operate around the Jabaliya refugee camp;

- south of Gaza City, clashes were reported between the IDF and militants in the Zaytun neighborhood;

- in southern Gaza, IDF units reached the village of Abasan (reftel), but no IDF activity was reported inside the urban area of Khan Yunis; and

- the IDF maintains its positions south of Rafah, near the defunct Gaza airport.

Additionally, press reported clashes the night of January 6 between IDF special forces and militants in Dayr al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. Four Palestinians were killed the night of January 6 when the IDF shelled a main street in downtown Gaza City.

3. (SBU) HAMAS sources told the press that their forces executed six Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel near Jabaliya and blamed collaborators for Israel's success in striking militants.

4. (SBU) UNRWA confirmed that 40 Palestinians were killed and 45 wounded when Israeli tanks targeted al-Fakhura School in Jabaliya (more detail septel). The IDF claimed militants were using the school as a base to launch mortars. OCHA also reported seven injuries in an UNRWA-run health clinic damaged during a January 6

airstrike on an adjacent building.

15. (SBU) An OCHA representative told EconOff the GoI will open Kerem Shalom and Nahal Oz for humanitarian supplies. Reports also indicated that Rafah will open January 7 to allow delivery of medical supplies and evacuate medical cases. The GoI informed OCHA that a "humanitarian pause" will be implemented January 7 from 1300 to 1600.

Airstrikes Continue

16. (SBU) Gaza-based sources and local press reported that IAF airstrikes resumed in support of ground operations the morning of January 7 and hit:

- the Zaytun and Shaykh Radwan neighborhoods in southeastern Gaza City, killing at least one militant and seven unidentified Palestinians and wounding at least one other militant;

- Bayt Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, killing one al-Aqsa militant and wounding two others;

- two houses near the Salah al-Din Gate, leading from Gaza into Egypt; and

- tunnels along the Egyptian border.

Rocket Fire Causes No Injuries

17. (SBU) Israeli media reported at least 4 rockets fired into Israel before 1300 on January 7, sending several Israelis into shock

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but otherwise causing no injuries or damage. Reports said a total of 45 rockets were fired into Israel on January 6.

Casualties

18. (SBU) Palestinian medical contacts in Gaza and local press report that 21 Palestinians were killed before 1300 local on January 7 by 1300 local, and 132 were killed on January 6. According to UN reporting, at least 640 Palestinians have been killed and 2850 injured requiring hospitalization since the beginning of hostilities. The UN estimates at least 25 percent of the dead are women and children, and up to 40 percent of the wounded. Save the Children reported that at least 101 children have died, and that at least 1134 of the wounded are women and children, based on Palestinian Ministry of Health numbers.

19. (SBU) UN contacts, ICRC contacts, and representatives of local human rights organizations told PolOff January 6 and 7 that, due to the rapidly changing environment and the inability to access areas of intense fighting, the fatality numbers are probably low, but more accurate numbers are unavailable. NGOs and press told ConGenOffs that they largely rely on numbers from hospital staff in Gaza, with some corroboration by local correspondents when possible.

110. (SBU) Israeli press reported that an IDF soldier was killed on patrol in northern Gaza January 6, bringing the total number of soldiers killed to six.

Political Reactions and Developments

111. (SBU) Following the shelling of the al-Fakhura school, PM Fayyad publicly condemned Israeli strikes that hit civilians. PalTel CEO Abd al-Malik Jabar said publicly that the Gaza telephone system will shut down "within 24 hours" unless the company can deliver fuel to its operators in the Strip.

West Bank Reactions and Security

112. (SBU) Demonstrations continued in towns throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem on January 6, among them:

-- university students at Bir Zeit and al-Quds in Abu Dis demonstrated on campus;

-- three Palestinians were lightly wounded in skirmishes with the IDF in Na'alin, and two were arrested in skirmishes near Hebron;

-- PASF confiscated four pipe bombs near the Islamic Charitable Society in Hebron; and

-- peaceful marches are planned in several West Bank towns January 7 at 1300 local.

WALLES